

## *Tauhi vā: Nurturing Tongan Sociospatial Ties in Maui and Beyond*

*Tēvita O Kaʻili*

Tapu mo e tangataʻifonua ʻo Vaihi  
Mo e Falelaʻā ʻo Maui ʻoku tuʻutai  
Talu ʻetau tutupu ʻi Pulotu mo Havaiki  
Mo e fetuʻutakinga ʻa Maama mo Langi  
ʻAho ni kuo u toe siutaka mai ki Vaihi ni  
Ke hoko atu e tauhi vā ne lalava talu mei tuai<sup>1</sup>

My sacred respect to the native people-land of Hawaiʻi  
And the Haleakalā of Maui and its beauty  
Since our origin in Pulotu and Havaiki  
Earth and Sky remained in contact  
Today, I return in search of nourishment to Hawaiʻi  
And to continue to nurture our vā that was woven  
from ancient times

### RETURNING TO HAWAIʻI

When I arrived on the island of Maui in the summer of 2002, I felt a sense of reverence toward this Hawaiian island. Deep inside my spirit, I knew that I was returning to a sacred place. As I felt the sacredness of the island of Maui, my mind began to ponder the similarities between *ʻāina* (the Hawaiian term for land),<sup>2</sup> and *kāinga* (the Tongan term for relatives/kin). Both terms are based on *ʻai/kai*, (to feed, to nourish).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, *ʻāina* and *kāinga* convey the central idea that people are fed, both physically and spiritually, by two important sources of nourishment: their land and their kin. As I reflected on this connection, I began to understand my feeling of reverence toward this island. Maui is one of the *ʻāina* that fed and nourished many of my ancestral *kāinga* during their ancient long-distance voyages in the moana, the open sea.

It was a moving experience for me, as a Tongan with genealogical ties to Koloa (one of my ancestor Maui's home islands in Tonga), to stand on the island of Maui—another home island of my ancestor Maui. Ever since I was a young boy, my elders told me countless stories about Maui, a cultural hero of the Moana people.<sup>4</sup> Maui, they said, had great mana. In ancient times, when the sun traveled too quickly over the skies, Maui snared the sun, releasing it only when it promised to travel more slowly and provide abundant daylight for our people. Knowing this story since my early childhood, I felt it a historical moment for me to finally walk near the Haleakalā summit, where Maui stood and snared the sun. With this and all of Maui's other superhuman abilities—raising the skies, fishing up islands with his māta'u fusifonua (land fishing hook), and smuggling fire from the underworld to our world—I have always been intrigued by Maui's ability to be present in almost all of the islands.<sup>5</sup> In Tonga, people talk about the same sun-snaring Maui as the people in Hawai'i. As I pondered Maui's presence in all of the Moana islands, I wondered how he kept ties with all of them. Perhaps my initial short visit to this island would help me get a sense of how Maui sustained relationships with many of his relatives who were dispersed yet connected across distant physical spaces.

### CONNECTING SOCIAL SPACES AT THE MARKET

Every Wednesday morning on the island of Maui, the 'Ohana Farmers and Crafters Market in the Kahului Center teems with local vendors (mostly Filipinos, with a handful of Tongans) and tourists, bargaining for fruits, vegetables, and handicrafts such as tapa, baskets, and tiki. As my public shuttle bus approached the main entrance to the market, I noticed a Tongan woman in the far left corner, under a large tree, selling bananas, taro, and coconuts, along with Tongan baskets, mats, and various designs and sizes of tapa cloth. I got out of my shuttle and stood a way off, watching her interactions with pālangi (white European/American) tourists. Noticing her all-black attire, I immediately suspected that she was going to a Tongan funeral. I watched her demeanor as the pālangi tourists approached, the way she stood up from her seat, folded her hands neatly in front of her body, and smiled as the tourists scanned the merchandise and asked for prices. After standing by for a few minutes, I walked over to her booth. Before I could say anything, the Tongan lady greeted me in English with a polite "Hello." Because I wanted her to know that I was Tongan, I quickly responded in Tongan: "Mālō e tau mo e ngāue" (Thank

you for persevering in your work).<sup>6</sup> Her facial expression changed immediately. She appeared both surprised and happy as our conversation continued in Tongan. I introduced myself by telling her my name and she responded by introducing herself as Sēini.<sup>7</sup> When she asked where I was from in Tonga, I responded by giving her the names of my parents and grandparents and their respective islands in Tonga. I told her my mother was from the island of Vava'u, and Sēini, being from the same island, wanted to know the name of my mother's village. I said my mother was from Neiafu, Tu'anuku, and Koloa. Sēini then told me the name of her village. Eagerly, I told her I had visited her village several times many years ago. We talked for several minutes, continuing this type of exchange, tracing our common genealogical connection to Vava'u. After our exchanges of genealogical information, she asked me what I was doing in Maui. I explained that I was there to do a study on the Tongan community. She then recommended that I could gain a lot of knowledge about the Tongan community in Maui by attending funerals and nightly faikava (kava parties). She informed me that two Tongan funerals were happening that week. She also gave me directions to the funeral homes and the times of the services. Toward the end of our conversation, she instructed her young boy to pack a bundle of nicely ripe bananas into a plastic shopping bag for me. I tried to decline by saying, "Kātaki, tuku ia mo e fakahela" (literally, Please, do not burden yourself), but after much banter about the gift, I eventually gave in. I said, "Mālō 'aupito" (Thank you very much), and I gratefully took the bag.

My interaction with Sēini, in terms of tracing our genealogical ties to Vava'u and sharing information and food, exemplified a Tongan way of locating (reestablishing) social connections by organizing and connecting sociospatial worlds. Despite the fact that I lived in Seattle, a big city thousands of miles from Kahului, Maui, our common genealogical link to the island of Vava'u created a shared social space for us in our very first encounter at the market. I began to wonder whether this form of sociospatial connection might be somehow similar to the kind of ties that kept Maui linked to his kin in Tonga, Sāmoa, Aotearoa, Tahiti, Rapa Nui, and Hawai'i in the past. If so, this form of sociospatial connection undoubtedly has a long history with the Moana people.

## SPACE TRAVEL

When it comes to "space travel," we usually do not think of the Moana people. Yet in the history of the world, the Moana people were unsur-

passed in their ability to venture into distant and unknown spaces. The Puluotu people, the ancestors of many of the Moana people, began their traveling tradition thousands of years ago.<sup>8</sup> Around 3,000 years ago, the ancestors of the Moanans began their long eastward migration toward an “oceanic outer space” (Kirch 2000, 97). Building on the legacy of their ancestors, Moanans became the first “space travelers” to traverse and crisscross one of the largest open spaces of our planet, the Pacific Ocean. In fact, their long-distance travels made them one of the most widely settled peoples in the world. Although they were widely dispersed, their ability to travel long distances allowed them to link distant island communities and establish far-reaching exchange and social networks. Memories of their voyages and spatial mobility are inscribed and recorded in their culture, most notably in the chants, stories, and songs extolling these great human adventures and achievements. For example, in Tonga, the song of the ancient dance Me‘etu‘upaki describes a sea route from Kiribati to Tonga (Futa Helu’s translation of this chant is cited in Hau‘ofa 2000, 466). Today, it is common knowledge that the Moana people achieved one of the greatest spatial movements in the history of the world. What we are only beginning to unravel, however, is the complexity of the socio-spatial ties linking Moanans to one another across such a great expanse of physical space.

### TONGANS’ NEW SPATIAL MOBILITY

Within the past forty years, Tongans, descendants of the Puluotu people, have been venturing out to distant spaces in new ways. This time they are not only starting from and returning to familiar places (Sāmoa, Aotearoa, Hawai‘i) but are also venturing further, to new places (Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, the US continent). In the continental United States, Tongan communities are flourishing in cities such as San Francisco, Seattle, and Salt Lake City, as well as in places like Euless, Texas; Denver, Colorado; and Anchorage, Alaska. Epeli Hau‘ofa views this spatial movement as an expansion of Oceania (1994, 151, 160). Recent census figures indicate the number of Tongans living abroad is equal to the number living in Tonga.<sup>9</sup> This modern migration is shaped by Tongans’ past history of spatial mobility and contemporary global economic conditions that facilitate the mass movements and multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and goods. Some scholars have labeled this process *transnationalism*: the cultural practice of forging and sustaining significant social and economic ties across nations (see, eg, Basch and others 1994; Okamura 1998).<sup>10</sup>

Most transnational migrants maintain close relationships with people in both their country of origin and their new place of settlement.

Tongan migrants are transnational in many respects. Although recent studies have shown that Tongans maintain strong linkages with other Tongans in the homeland and with their kin in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States (Evans 2001; Small 1997; Lee 2003), none of the studies have examined the influence of the Tongan notion of social space in organizing Tongan transnational relations. Space is central to this understanding, because transnational practices involve the movement and flows of people within space and across spatial boundaries while the people maintain sociospatial connections with one another, in the homeland or abroad. It is also important because transnational migrants are active in *reconfiguring space, so that their lives are lived simultaneously within two or more nation-states*. The importance of space in transnationalism is highlighted in Aihwa Ong's definition of transnationality as "the condition of cultural interconnectedness and *mobility across space*" (1999, 4; emphasis mine). This recognition of space as a central concept is also apparent in David Harvey's claim that "space and time are foundational concepts for almost everything we think and do" (1996, 208). Moreover, Michel Foucault stated that "space is fundamental in any form of communal life" (1984, 252). In the case of global relations, space (as well as time) is fundamental to our understanding of transnationality. It is also important to note that space and time are conceptualized differently in various societies. Recently anthropologists have recognized the importance of space in anthropological analysis. Since the influential work on space by scholars such as Foucault (1980), Henri Lefebvre (1991), and Edward Soja (1996), an increasing number of anthropologists have been advocating for anthropological theories of space (see, eg, Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Kahn 2000; Rodman 1992).

## STUDIES ON TONGAN TRANSNATIONALITY

In *Voyages: From Tongan Villages to American Suburbs* (1997), Cathy Small presented her fieldwork on Tongan migration and transnationalism, spanning fifteen years. Her book chronicles the life of a Tongan family whose members were dispersed in Tonga and California. This Tongan family was part of a new global phenomenon known as "transnational family"—family members who live apart in different countries (nation-states) while maintaining strong ties with one another. Small found that almost every household in the family's home village had someone living

overseas—mostly in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. This spatial dispersion led to the creation of many Tongan transnational families. Based on her research, Small argued that the migration of Tongans overseas did not represent a rejection of Tongan traditional ways but rather was a way of securing a “good Tongan life” in order to fulfill cultural obligations to kin and extended kin. With tightening economic conditions, land shortage, and scarcity of jobs in Tonga, overseas migration has become an avenue for locating new resources to fulfill kinship obligations. According to Small, reciprocal exchanges appear to be a crucial cultural practice for maintaining relationships between Tongans in the homeland and their kin overseas.

Similarly, Hau‘ofa’s 1994 essay “Our Sea of Islands” points to the ancient practice of reciprocity as the core of all Moanan cultures, one that continues to be central in Moanans’ lives in transnational spaces (1994, 157). For instance, relatives abroad send money and goods such as appliances, clothes, and watches to their relatives in the homeland. Homeland relatives reciprocate with goods such as mats, tapa, kava, taro, and yams—goods they produce and grow. In addition, homeland relatives maintain ancestral roots and lands, and keep “homes with warmed hearths for travelers to return permanently or to strengthen their bonds, their soul, and their identities before they move on” (Hau‘ofa 1994, 157).

More recently, Mike Evans presented a study of Tongan gift exchange in his book, *Persistence of the Gift: Tongan Tradition in Transnational Context* (2001). Noting that Tongans are now dispersed across the Pacific and beyond, Evans wrote that the Tongan diaspora is the “result of many individual decisions taken within a cultural frame rooted and reproduced in particularly Tongan sensibilities” (2001, 2). He argued persuasively that even though Tongan culture now exists within a transnational context, Tonga’s noncapitalist forms of social organization, such as gift exchange, continue to “function effectively and in articulation with the capitalist world market” (2001, 2).

Evans identified three Tongan core principles that organize the reciprocal exchanges of gifts at all levels of Tongan society: ‘ofa (love and generosity); faka‘apa‘apa (respect); and fetokoni‘aki (mutual assistance) (2001, 57). For Evans, all kin and kin-like relationships are expressed in some combination of these principles. Further, Evans argued, “potential social relationships are actualized and maintained by mutual exchange,” and some degree of reciprocity is expected in all relationships (2001, 58).

I agree with Evans that ‘ofa, faka‘apa‘apa, and fetokoni‘aki are core

principles in organizing gift exchanges in a transnational context. However, I would include as another core principle the cultural value of tauhi vā, that is, caring for sociospatial relations. In the context of transnational exchanges, the cultural value and practice of tauhi vā, ‘ofa, faka‘apa‘apa, and fetokoni‘aki are all woven together to produce the uniqueness of Tongan transnationalism.

Although both Small and Evans focused on mutual exchanges or reciprocity as crucial elements in maintaining Tongan transnational connections, neither of them provided a spatial explanation for these mutual exchanges. This omission is significant, because Tongans generally view reciprocal exchange, whether within Tonga or transnationally, as a socio-spatial practice, or tauhi vā—taking care of sociospatial relations with kin and kin-like members. It is crucial to view Tongan transnationality within the framework of Tongan spatial practices because tauhi vā has been acknowledged by many Tongan elders as one of the fundamental cultural values of Tongan society (see Moala 1994, 23).<sup>11</sup>

## TAUHI VĀ: NURTURING SOCIO.SPATIAL TIES

### *Vā: Space between People or Things*

In order to grasp the complexities of tauhi vā, we must first understand the meaning of vā, sociospatial connection. The word *vā* is not unique to Tonga, for cognates are found in many Moanan languages. Vā can be glossed as “space between people or things.” This notion of space is known in Tonga, Sāmoa, Rotuma, and Tahiti as vā, while in Aotearoa and Hawai‘i it is known as wā. Vā (or wā) points to a specific notion of space, namely, space between two or more points. When Tongan seafarers sail from one island to another, the open sea between the two islands is called vaha or vahanoa (both words are formed from the root word *vā*). Even in today’s high-tech world, when my Tongan friends in Aotearoa and Australia use the Internet to contact me, they call the Internet “Vahaope”—another word constructed out of the root word *vā*.<sup>12</sup> The Moanan idea of space, vā, emphasizes space in between. This is fundamentally different from the popular western notion of space as an expanse or an open area.

Although Moanan cultural concepts such as mana and tapu have been studied and analyzed by anthropologists, linguists, and historians, almost no academic attention has been given to vā, the Moanan notion of space. To the best of my knowledge, only a handful of scholars have briefly mentioned vā in their works. Giovanni Bennardo, who has studied the cogni-

tive representation of space in Tonga, described vaha'a (vā) as a space between two objects that is treated as if it were an object itself (2000a, 39).<sup>13</sup> Bradd Shore referred to vā in connection with the Samoan concept of *teu le vā*, or taking care of the relationship (1982, 136, 311). Allesandro Duranti briefly mentioned vā in his studies of Samoan key expressions in transnational communities (1997, 345). Albert Wendt also discussed vā and its importance to the Samoan view of reality (1999, 403), pointing out that the well-known Samoan expression "*Ia teu le va*" means to "cherish, nurse, and care for the va, the relationship" (1999, 402). More recently, Sitiveni Halapua has argued for the maintaining of good vā and the use of the *talanoa* process ("frank expression without concealment in face-to-face storytelling") within the context of reconciliation, especially in the context of Fiji (2003).

Although few scholars have discussed vā in their works, I believe that 'Okusitino Māhina, a Tongan historian and anthropologist, is the only scholar who is giving critical attention and in-depth analysis to vā as well as its companion, *tā*, time (see Māhina 2002). Māhina has categorized four main dimensions of vā: physical, social, intellectual, and symbolic (Māhina, pers comm, 6 Nov 2002). Within human social contexts, vā is experienced in social, sociospatial relations, and space between people (Māhina 2002). In *tauhi vā*, vā is connected to all four dimensions, but it is primarily based on the social dimension of vā.<sup>14</sup>

All four dimensions of vā are interrelated. In the interpersonal social context, vā refers to both social relations and space. Tongans describe extended family members who are tightly knit and socially close to one another as *vāofi* (literally, spatially near to one another). This suggests that sociality and spatiality are linked together in Tongan social ontology. Tongans experience social relations spatially and come to know space socially. Thus, for Tongans, human relationships are both socially and spatially constituted. Since vā is the social space between individuals or groups, it also relates and connects individuals and groups to one another.

The shared sociospatial connection of vā is apparent in the context of *kāinga* relations. For *kāinga* members, vā encompasses the sociospatial ties that are created among *kāinga* who are genealogically woven together. In fact, in Tonga, *kāinga* members are conceptualized as a product of weaving. Weaving metaphors are frequently found in Tongan ideas of people and genealogy, as in the Tongan expression, "'Oku hangē 'a e tangata ha fala 'oku lālanga" (Mankind is like a mat being woven) (Rogers 1977, 157, 180). This saying expresses the Tongan idea that a person is woven



genealogically from multiple and overlapping kinship strands.<sup>15</sup> In this context, we can understand vā as the social spaces that are created among kāinga members who are woven together genealogically, like a mat.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of weaving is central not only to genealogy but also to the process of socializing Tongan children. In a Tonga College alumni meeting that I attended in Salt Lake City, Utah, a few years ago, Folau, a former schoolmate, spoke the following words in his closing prayer: “Oku mau fakafeta'i ko e 'apiako ne fai mei ai homau lalanga” (We are indeed grateful for the school in which we were woven). Folau's words illustrate the Tongan cultural belief that educating or socializing children is a form of weaving. Children are woven (educated) with good values and behaviors. Also reflecting this weaving idea is the Tongan proverb, “Papata pē ka na'e lalanga” (Coarse textual pattern but woven), which means that Tongans value woven (educated) children, and their outward physical appearance (whether coarse or proportionately refined) is secondary. 'Olivia Kavapalu has pointed out that the weaving of Tongan children with Tongan values is the highest form of weaving (2000). An important part of this practice is to weave children who respect Tongan values, such as 'ofa, faka'apa'apa, fetokoni'aki (love, respect, and mutual assistance—the core principles identified by Evans) as well as tauhi vā.

In traditional Tonga, genealogy weaves together connections to kāinga (kin members) as well as fonua (land and its people) (Māhina 1992; 1999a, 281–282). Thus, people are woven together genealogically via kāinga and fonua ties. The identities of Tongans are determined by their genealogical connections to their fonua and to their kāinga. When I meet another Tongan, I say I am the son of 'Anapesi Lakalaka Mālohifo'ou and Tēvita Ka'ili from Kolofo'ou, Tongatapu. My paternal grandparents are 'Ilaise Mafi from Hā'ano, Fakakakai, and Pangai, Ha'apai, and Rotuma; and Viliami Soakai Pulu from Ma'ofanga and Kolonga, Tongatapu. My maternal grandparents are Meliame Loata Toki of Tu'anuku, Vava'u; and Tonga Pōteki Mālohifo'ou of Koloa and Neiafu, Vava'u, and Lakeba, Fiji.<sup>17</sup> In Tongan social contexts, tracing of hohoko (genealogy) is a cultural practice of positioning oneself within one's genealogy in order to organize a vā (sociospatial tie) with another Tongan. This was the case when I met Pita, a Tongan man in Seattle, for the first time. He asked, “Kātaki mu'a 'o fakahoko mai koe” (literally, Please connect [introduce] yourself).<sup>18</sup> The word *fakahoko* is appropriate in this context because it means to make a connection with another person. Through hohoko, kāinga members are socially and spatially joined. In formal cultural

events, such as funerals, kāinga members perform their fatongia (communal duties) as a way of reaffirming and reinforcing their vā.<sup>19</sup> The performance of fatongia creates the flow and circulation of goods and services between social spaces and simultaneously reinforces and reaffirms the sociospatial ties of genealogy.<sup>20</sup>

Because vā is the social or relational space connecting people, it suggests that the Tongan notion of space places more emphasis on spaces that link and join people. For Tongans overseas who are related, no matter how far apart they are dispersed in physical space, they can still be sociospatially connected to one another through genealogy. This appears to be the case for many other off-island Moanans. For instance, J Kēhaulani Kauanui has noted that for off-island Hawaiians living in the continental United States, their genealogical connections are primary, with geographical distance secondary (1998, 690).

### *Tauhi vā: Commitment to Nurture Sociospatial Ties*

In everyday conversation, tauhi vā is often defined as the Tongan value and practice of keeping good relations with kin and friends. It is also thought of as a commitment to sustain harmonious social relations with kin and kin-like members. The word *tauhi* means to take care, to tend, or to nurture. Māhina has drawn similarities between tauhi vā and the Tongan art of lalava—the art of lashing coconut fiber ropes (kafa) to bind Tongan house beams together. On a more abstract level, Māhina has defined lalava as the “Tongan art of lineal and spatial intersection” (2002). Within this lalava framework, tauhi vā is the social practice of reinforcing people’s connection in space. For Tongans as for other Moanans, nurturing ties between individuals and kāinga generally involves reciprocal exchanges of economic and social goods.<sup>21</sup>

Even though the practice of tauhi vā is most visible during formal cultural events—such as marriages, funerals, christenings, birthdays, and misinale (church offering celebrations)—tauhi vā also exists in more informal, everyday practices. It is manifested in sharing foods, offering one’s home to kin, and sharing resources with kin and people. Moreover, tauhi vā takes place not only among kāinga members but also in kāinga-like relationships with friends, schoolmates, coworkers, kāingalotu (fellow church members), and so on. In addition, tauhi vā operates across generations. Hohoko is both temporal and spatial in the bonds it weaves between people. For instance, people often reciprocate goods to the children or grandchildren of the person from whom they received goods in the

past. In both Seattle and Maui, I have received many goods from Tongans because of my parents’ and grandparents’ practice of tauhi vā in the past. In Seattle, a Tongan named Sione invited me to his house for dinner the first time I met him, because my father always took good care of him in Tonga, and it was my father who helped Sione to attend college in the 1980s. Past history of tauhi vā from other spaces and places (such as Tonga) continues to be the foundation for organizing my sociospatial ties with Tongans in Seattle, where I now live. This form of tauhi vā affirms and reaffirms the sociospatial bonds across generations. In this cross-generation context, children are born into multiple, preexisting social spaces. The performance of tauhi vā is often etched forever in the memories of people involved in the process. As long as kāinga members remember past history of tauhi vā, the social spaces of parents, grandparents, and other ancestors and relatives will most likely be passed on to their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so forth.

*Fonua: Genealogical Link between Land and its People.*

Fonua is an integral part of Tongan genealogy and sense of place. The link between land and people is embedded in the Tongan concept of fonua—land *and* its people. Fonua encompasses the spiritual and genealogical oneness of land and its people, and, at the same time, the reciprocal exchanges between them. Within this mutually beneficial reciprocal relationship, people take care of (tauhi) their land, and in return, the land nourishes its people. Māhina defined fonua as “both ‘land’ and ‘people.’ More particularly, it espouses the ‘unity’ deriving from the ongoing exchange between land and people. . . . In Tonga, eg, the mother’s ‘placenta,’ ‘land [and its people]’ and one’s grave are all called fonua. That is, that one is born out of a fonua into a fonua, who, upon death, enters another fonua. . . . Upon birth, the new-born, . . . living in society, continues to receive nourishment, this time from the land and its people, until death, when the body returns . . . to the land in the form of efuefu ‘dust’ and kelekele ‘earth,’ which, in turn, continues the nourishment of the living and awaits the sustenance of generations yet to come” (Māhina 1999a, 282).

This connection to the land is not unique to Tongans; similar relationships are found among other Moanans. For Hawaiians, mālama ‘āina is a cultural value and practice of serving and caring for their ancestral land. Mālama ‘āina means cultivating and husbanding the land; in return, the land will feed and provide for Hawaiians (Trask 1993, 186). Lilikalā

Kame‘eleihiwa explained that “it is the duty of Hawaiians to Mālama ‘Āina, and as a result of this proper behavior, the ‘Āina will mālama Hawaiians” (1992, 25). This is a kinship or familial relationship with the land. Miriam Kahn found that Tahitians also have a reciprocal relationship with their land. Genealogies instruct them concerning their spiritual and familial relationship with their land. Again, the relationship is reciprocal: they care for their land, and in return, their land feeds and provides for them. For Tahitians, the land is viewed as a mother who nourishes her children (Kahn 2000, 10). According to Marama, a Tahitian mother, the *pu fenua* (placenta) “is always put back in the earth. When the child is in the womb the mother takes care of it, but when it is born the mother calls the land to take care of her child. The land will give life to the person by providing food” (quoted in Kahn 2000, 10).

Fonua is a crucial element of Tongan genealogy. In the *tala tukufakaholo e fonua* (oral tradition of the land), Tongans are descendants of *Limu* (seaweed) and *Kele* (mud clay), two natural elements of the homeland of Tonga—the fonua of all Tongans. Within this tradition, all Tongans are connected genealogically to Tonga (their fonua) and to one another. In Tongan compositions, names of islands, villages, and *mātanga* (historical or scenic spots) are frequently employed as metaphors for people from those particular places (see Helu 1999, 272; Māhina 1993, 113). Several years ago, when my maternal grandfather, Tonga Pōteki Mālohifo‘ou, was composing songs in Salt Lake City for members of our family, he included several Tongan place names in his compositions as metaphors for particular family members. This interchange of places for people points to the genealogical unity between land and people. Tongans and their land are indivisible. Within this fonua genealogical context, Tongans who can trace their genealogy to the same fonua (ie, village), who coexist and are nourished by the same fonua, consider themselves *kāinga*.<sup>22</sup>

Today, in Tongan communities outside of Tonga, fonua genealogies are often recited to organize *vā* for Tongans who are dispersed in different locales. This was clearly illustrated in my interaction with Sēini at the market.

## TONGANS IN MAUI, HAWAI‘I

Tongans began migrating to O‘ahu, Hawai‘i, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. For over twenty years, most of the Tongans who were moving to Hawai‘i came to attend the Church College of Hawai‘i (now known as

Brigham Young University–Hawai‘i) and to work at the Polynesian Cultural Center, both owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in Lā‘ie, Hawai‘i. It was not until the late 1970s that Tongan families moved from O‘ahu to the island of Maui, to take advantage of its booming tourist economy. Maui, the second largest island in Hawai‘i, is now a major tourist destination, with more than two million visitors per year. The migration of Tongans to Maui represents a Tongan strategy of securing resources for tauhi vā with kin who are in Tonga and other countries. Tongan families were originally attracted by the booming tree-trimming work associated with the tourist industry in Maui. Tree-trimming service is an important part of Maui’s tourist economy; it keeps Hawai‘i “attractive” and “safe” for the millions of tourists who stay in resorts and hotels on the island. Tongan tree-trimmers prune and shape tree branches, remove stumps, and pick coconuts—to prevent coconuts from accidentally falling on tourists. Tree trimming is a profitable work and a major source of income for Tongans in Maui. For example, Mote, a Tongan raised in Maui, told me that in the 1980s Tongan tree-trimmers were paid \$60.00 per coconut tree. Since tree trimming provided relatively good income for Tongans, the original Tongan families who migrated to Maui began a chain of kin-based migration; they brought many of their relatives to Maui to work for their tree-trimming businesses.

Migration stories of most Tongans in Maui are directly or indirectly connected to the original Tongan families who migrated to Maui. Sālote, a member of the original Maui Tongan families, told me that when her father first arrived in Maui he helped his kin in Tonga by first buying a home and then sponsoring them to move to Maui and live with him, rent free, while working for his tree-trimming business. Although initially tree trimming was the main work that attracted Tongans to Maui, over the years many Tongans began to expand to other tourist-related work, such as building stone-wall fences, wood carving, construction, landscaping, and hotel housekeeping. Today, several Tongans in Maui run their own wood-carving and tree-trimming businesses. Maui Tongans are part of the global Pacific Islander labor force that Hau‘ofa has described as the people who “keep [the city’s] streets and buildings . . . clean, and its transportation system running smoothly; they keep the suburbs of the western United States (including Hawai‘i) trimmed, neat, green, and beautiful; and they have contributed much, much more than has been acknowledged” (1994, 157). In 1990, according to official statistics, 631 Tongans resided in Maui. By 2000, the Tongan population had doubled to 1,269, making

Tongans second only to Native Hawaiians as the largest Pacific Islander group in Maui (State of Hawaii 2000). Most Tongans in Maui live in four main towns: Kahului, Kihei, Lahaina, and Honokahua. Most of the Tongan-speaking Christian churches are also located in these towns.

#### TAUHI VĀ IN TRANSNATIONAL SPACES:

##### *Encountering Tauhi vā*

My first awareness of the significance of tauhi vā in transnational spaces was not in Maui, but in Seattle during my work as a research assistant to Barbara Burns McGrath's Project Talanoa—a study funded by the National Institutes of Health to develop a culturally meaningful HIV prevention program for US Pacific Island adolescents.<sup>23</sup> As a Tongan researcher and a new member of the Seattle Tongan community,<sup>24</sup> I soon realized that the willingness of many Seattle Tongans to participate in my research was motivated, in part, by their desire to maintain vā with me and my family (Ka'ili and McGrath 2001). My genealogy created my sociospatial ties with many members of the Tongan community in Seattle. In most of my first interview meetings, my genealogy was the critical piece of information Seattle Tongans wanted to know. They asked, for example, who were my parents and which village were they from? The beginning of every research interview became a time to recite genealogies, kāinga and fonua, and to trace possible genealogical ties. My interviews were supposed to take only an hour, but they ended up taking an average of three hours: one hour for research interviews and the rest for tracing genealogies, reminiscing about Tonga, and eating Tongan food. Over time it became clear to me that when my Tongan participants located genealogical connections with me, they were more willing to help with my research. For them, my presence in the community was an opportunity to nurture and reaffirm their sociospatial ties with me, my parents, my grandparents, and my other ancestors. Throughout my research, it was my genealogy and my ancestors' past tauhi vā that opened the particular social space for me to do my work. Seattle Tongans performed tauhi vā in the form of providing me with important information for my research as well as offering me food on many occasions. In return for their kindness, I nurtured my vā with them by going on a weekly basis to Manamo'ui Center (a Seattle Tongan Community Center) to tutor the children of my Tongan participants. Also, on several occasions, I gave presentations to Tongan parents about ways to prepare their children for college and to access resources from the University of Washington.

*Reaffirming My Vā with Tongans in Maui*

In Maui, once again I entered a Tongan social space. Although it was my first visit to Maui, as well as my first time to meet the Tongans there, I immediately became part of their social space. This social space was reaffirmed once my genealogical links with Maui Tongans were established.<sup>25</sup> As mentioned earlier, whether in the Farmers Market or Maui Swap Meet, once Tongans established our genealogical ties, they generally practiced tauhi vā with me in the form of sharing their food (green coconuts, ripe bananas, etc), even though they charged everyone else—especially the tourists. One time, Misi, a Tongan vendor at the Maui Swap Meet, offered me a free, ice-cold green coconut from his cooler. It was a hot and humid day, so I did not resist his offer. While I was quenching my thirst with my ice-cold coconut, I noticed that the tourists were paying \$3.00 each for their green coconuts. I tried to pay for my coconut, but Misi told me (in Tongan) to save my money while at the same time he was telling the tourist (in English) that the coconut cost \$3.00.

I encountered the same treatment when I visited some of the Tongan wood-carvers (tiki carvers) in Maui. While riding the public shuttle one day, I noticed a big wooden sign hanging on the left side of the road, which read: “Master Wood Carver, Sifa.” I asked the shuttle driver to stop; I got off and walked over to Sifa’s carving stand. I greeted Sifa by saying, “Mālō e tau mo e ngāue” (Thank you for persevering in your work), and we shook hands. Sifa, recognizing that I was Tongan, invited me to come inside and sit next to him on his carving mat. Sifa’s carving mat was placed in the middle of the ground with several tiki and carvings placed in rows on the tiki-stands surrounding his mat—as though the tiki were protecting Sifa. I then sat down and introduced myself by telling him my name, my parents’ names, my grandparents’ names, and their respective villages. While I was reciting my genealogy, Sifa stopped me and told me that we were related through my mother. He then explained how we were related. I was elated that I had found another person from the island of Vava‘u. Sifa then motioned to me to lean forward and he said, “Ha‘u ke ta fe‘iloaki” (Come and let us greet one another). Fe‘iloaki is to kiss cheek-to-cheek—the Tongan way of greeting relatives. We then talked for several hours and I gave him a brief update about all of the family members in the continental United States. At the end of our conversation, Sifa offered me a tiki from his stand. I declined several times but reassured Sifa that I would return to see him before I left Maui. When I returned several days before I left Maui, Sifa told me again to take a tiki for myself as

a gift. When I took a small tiki (less than one foot high) from his stand he shook his head in disapproval and insisted that I take a larger one. I declined several times again, but in the end, Sifa won, and I accepted his tiki with much gratitude. The Hawaiian name of the tiki that I took is Ku'ai.<sup>26</sup> Sifa carved on the bottom of the tiki: "Ku'ai, Maui 2002, Sifa." This was his way of making sure that I remember the name of the tiki, the carving place and year, and him, the carver. I asked Sifa about Ku'ai, and he said: Ku'ai was the Hawaiian god who protected the ancient temples. I felt good that I picked a protective god.

I knew that Sifa insisted I take one of his larger tiki because of my grandmother. In the past my maternal grandmother maintained good *vā* with Sifa. After my visit with Sifa, he thanked me by saying: "Mālō e 'a'ahi mai mei motu lahi. Neongo 'etau nofo vāmama'o ka 'oku 'ikai teitei ngalo hotau vā" (Thank you for visiting me from the continent. Even though we now live far apart, I never forget our *vā*).

Siope, another Tongan wood-carver, also gave me two tiki. In our first meeting at his tiki stand, he asked me my name and my parents' names. When I told him, he appeared excited, and he told me that we were related through my father. We greeted each other with *fe'iloaki* and then talked for several hours, during which time I observed him explaining to the tourists the names and meanings of his various tiki. While we talked, he offered me food and he even asked me if I needed any money. I ate the food he gave me but told him that I did not need any money. At the end of our conversation, he gave me two carvings—a tiki and a dolphin—as gifts.

In all these incidents, my close genealogical connections with the carvers and vendors established our *vā*. Our social spaces were then nurtured and reinforced through the sharing of information and food and the offering of tiki and money. Sometimes I was not offered any tiki; this usually happened with Tongans with whom I could not establish close genealogical ties. For example, one Saturday, I met a Tongan vendor at the swap meet. We exchanged genealogies but found we did not know anything about each other's family. We talked and exchanged information about our families, but at the end, he did not offer me a tiki. I believe that because we could not establish a strong genealogical link, there was no *vā* to be nurtured.

### *Tauhi vā among Kāinga in Maui and Beyond*

In Maui, tauhi *vā* among *kāinga* members is manifested in multiple ways, as is apparent even to non-Tongans living in Maui. Rita, a Filipino woman



who has helped many Tongans to apply for immigration visas, told me that Tongans in Maui are excelling in school and business because “they take care and help one another.” In her many interactions with Tongans on the island, she said she felt that they have a strong “camaraderie” among themselves, and that Tongans care about kin members, first and foremost, before making money or profit. I found her observation to be true in the relationship between Sifa and some of the Tongan tree-trimmers. In Maui, Sifa, a Tongan from Vava‘u, receives most of his carving wood, free of charge, from Tongan tree-trimmers who are also from Vava‘u. After cutting trees, the tree-trimmers give their wood to Sifa so that he can use it to make his tiki and other carvings. The tree-trimmers even take special care to identify certain trees (ie, monkey pod and milo) and cut them in appropriate sizes for tiki and wood carvings.

Sifa and these tree-trimmers are genealogically related to one another as members of the same fonua—the island of Vava‘u. The vā between Sifa and his trimmers is created by their fonua genealogical ties and is reinforced by the trimmers’ act of sharing their woods with Sifa. Sifa told me that he regularly attends Tongan kalapu (fundraising events) held by some of the trimmers to donate money—which is Sifa’s way of enacting tauhi vā with many of the tree-trimmers.

Sending money to Tongan relatives in Tonga, New Zealand, and Australia is a major part of the transnational tauhi vā process for Tongans in Maui. While shopping at the local Foodland supermarket in Kahului, Maui, I noticed a long line of Tongans standing in front of the Western Union counter, waiting for the next available clerk to assist them in sending money to their relatives. This Western Union counter is located conveniently inside Foodland, a store where many Tongans do their grocery shopping. One morning while I was there, I asked one of the Western Union clerks which countries they send most of the money to. Without hesitation, the clerk said, “By far, we send more money to the Philippines and Tonga.”<sup>27</sup> He went on to say that he had processed three transactions to Tonga that morning (it was around 10 AM). He even quoted from memory the Tongan exchange rate, adding that it was a good time to send money to Tonga because US\$1.00 was worth \$2.64 Tongan pa‘anga (Tongan dollar). The clerk also reported that Tongans not only send money to their relatives in Tonga, but also to their relatives in New Zealand and Australia, and occasionally to family members on the continental United States. What I learned from the clerk is supported by what I heard from Tongans in Maui. Sālotē told me that her relatives live with her for free while they send a good portion of their money to their kin in

Tonga. In a similar manner, Sifa, the wood-carver, has been making tiki in Maui for twenty years. In that time, Sifa has been sending a substantial amount of his money to Tonga to support his relatives. His relatives have used the money to build a family house, pay school fees, buy a car, and even as misinale (church donations). Sifa came to Maui in the early 1980s and has never been to the continental United States. He works six days a week as a carver in order to make enough money to send to Tonga as well as to support himself in Maui. Because a good portion of his money goes back to Tonga, it is difficult for him to save enough to visit his relatives on the continental United States, although he hopes to do so one day. For now, Sifa is content that he is able to practice tauhi vā with his relatives in Tonga by regularly sending them money from his tiki business.

Because tiki are in such high demand by the tourists, the tiki carvers must resort to creative means to keep their carving stands well stocked. Carvers utilize their vā with their kin members and fellow villagers in Tonga to supply them with needed quotas of tiki. Kin members in Tonga carve tiki, pack them in sacks, and send them by plane to their kin in Maui to be sold to tourists. Sifa reported that his relatives in Tonga send him tiki and other Tongan handicrafts (eg, fans, baskets) on a regular basis. Tongans in Maui, like Sifa, actively use their knowledge of sociospatial ties to succeed in Maui's tourist economy. By relying on tauhi vā with Tongan tree-trimmers and relatives in Tonga, tiki carvers are able to realize a relatively good income from their tiki sales. In turn, much of the profit from the tiki sales is remitted to support relatives in Tonga. Some carvers reported to me that they have taken over the hand-carved tiki market in Maui. According to Maka, another carver, Tongans are unique in primarily hand-carving the tiki they sell to tourists.

Some of the tiki carvers that I interviewed started out by working as wood-carvers for hotel and resort lū'au. After years of this type of work, they quit because most of the profit from the tiki sales went to the hotels and resorts. They then began to establish their own carving businesses, relying mainly on other Tongans (such as tree-trimmers) as wood suppliers. This move to establish their own businesses, however, created another problem, namely, loss of medical coverage. One carver solved this problem by having his wife work as a housekeeping maid in a hotel so that they could maintain medical coverage.

In summary, Tongans in Maui actively participate in tauhi vā with their kāinga. Tiki carvers and tree-trimmers practice tauhi vā with one another. When they send remittances to relatives, Tongans are participating in

transnational tauhi vā with kin who are living in Tonga and other countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the continental United States. With the tiki carvers and the tree-trimmers, their vā is created not only out of kāinga genealogy but also, in many cases, out of their fonua genealogy. A genealogical connection to the same fonua takes on more significance in Maui, especially when biological kin members are not always available. Within the context of Maui’s tourist economy, vā organized on the basis of fonua genealogy emerges as a powerful force for creating sociospatial business networks for Tongans. These Tongan networks also appear in other overseas Tongan communities.

The practice of tauhi vā, with genealogical roots in kāinga or fonua, serves both to benefit Tongans and to reinforce sociospatial ties with kin members in Maui and beyond. But there are limits. Because the practice of tauhi vā requires a lot of time, energy, and resources, some Tongans in Maui are selective about nurturing social spaces with others. I met some Tongans in the swap meet who offered me neither food nor wood carvings. Sometimes the practice of tauhi vā is so demanding that Tongans are working all the time to take care of their social spaces with their kin. For example, Sifa has never visited his relatives in the continental United States because he lacks the money. Because Sifa continues to send his money to Tonga, he will always have a difficult time saving enough spending money to visit his relatives in the continental United States. In other words, the demands of tauhi vā keep Sifa “chained” to his tiki-carving business. Here we can see that Sifa’s sociospatial ties to his kin in Tonga are maintained—even at a price.

### *Tauhi vā among Kāingalotu in Maui*

Any discussion of tauhi vā would not be complete without exploring tauhi vā within church and religious spaces. Since the advent of Christianity in Tonga, churches have become a central part of Tongan life. Evans argued that no study of Tongan society “can ignore the significance of the various churches at all levels of Tongan culture”; in fact, “most ceremonial activity is organized through the churches” (2001, 135). The significance of the church becomes even more important in the organization of social spaces in Tongan overseas communities (Lee 2003, 41–45; Morton 1998; Small 1997, 70). In her study of diasporic Tongans in Australia, Helen Morton found that churches create the spaces for reaffirming, reconstructing, contesting, and refashioning anga faka-Tonga (Tongan culture). This is done through church camps, seminars, and debates (Morton 1998, 9–10, 19).

Small also identified churches as one of the centers for Tongan life in California (1997, 70). Similarly, several studies on Samoan communities in the United States indicate that churches are a central part of Samoan lives. In his study of Samoans in urban California, Craig Janes claimed that ethnic Samoan churches are the most important institutions for integrating dispersed Samoan kindred (1990, 77). This integration is done through various church-related activities, which gather dispersed Samoan 'āiga (kin groups) in the same physical space. Even as early as the 1970s, Joan Ablon noted a correlation between church attendance and frequency of interaction among Samoan kin members in California (1971, 80). More recently, McGrath reported in her study of Samoans in Seattle that churches teach Samoan children about their connection to their 'āiga and community (2002, 11). Church activities bring 'āiga together, and include not only weekly Sunday services but also church meetings, choir practice, youth groups, health and homemaking parties, and sporting events (McGrath 2002, 28). While I was conducting research for Project Talanoa in Seattle, members of my kāingalotu actively recruited Tongans to help me with my research. In short, churches create a space for maintaining and reinforcing kinship connections and relationship. In Maui, this was also the case with Tongan kāingalotu groups.

In the early 1980s, when the number of Tongans in Maui was relatively small, all Tongans, regardless of denomination, held Sunday services together in the same chapel. Over time, as each Tongan denomination increased in size, they separated into their various church buildings. Maui Tongans reported to me that there are now twelve separate Tongan kāingalotu (congregations) in Maui. The most visible Tongan churches are the Tongan United Methodist churches. While in Maui, I noticed two church kiosks in Kahului and Lahaina with postings of Tongan-language services for United Methodist Churches. Even local newspapers, such as the *Lahaina News*, printed ads indicating the time and place for Tongan-language services.

Membership in Tongan churches creates important sociospatial ties for Tongans in Maui. The *vā* of church members is created by their common membership in a congregation. Kāingalotu are linked in a genealogical-like manner to one another because they are being nourished by fellow members and a common religious space. The use of the word *kāingalotu* (*kāinga*: kin; *lotu*: religion) to denote a Tongan congregation makes explicit the kin-like ties among congregation members. The genealogical-like linking of kāingalotu members creates *vā* among them. Within this

sociospatial connection, tauhi vā occurs among church members. In Maui, I became aware of my vā with my fellow kāingalotu when I met ‘Api for the first time at one of Lahaina’s tourist markets. In the process of sharing our genealogies, ‘Api became aware of our membership in the same religion. Once ‘Api knew our kāingalotu ties, he immediately offered to pick me up for church and invited me to have dinner at his house after church one Sunday. The way ‘Api treated me was repeated many times in my interactions with other Tongans who were members of my kāingalotu. In Wailuku (the town where I stayed in Maui), Tuki, another Tongan from the church that I attended, picked me up for church every Sunday and always invited me for dinner after church. One Sunday, after we had dinner at this house, he said to me in the most sincere tone, “Manatu‘i, ko ho‘o ha‘u pē mei ‘api ki ‘api” (Don’t forget, my home is your home). “If you ever need anything, don’t hesitate to call me.” Basically, Tuki was telling me that I was no stranger but a member of his kāinga (in the kāingalotu sense). Tuki not only fed me every Sunday, but also invited me to stay with him and offered his pickup truck for me to use in my travels to conduct my research interviews.

Often in the context of churches, kāingalotu ties are woven together with kāinga and fonua genealogy to create one’s vā with other members. The first time I attended a Tongan church in Lahaina, Maui, I got up during the service and introduced myself by giving my genealogy. I had heard from other Tongans in Maui that many of the Tongans in Lahaina were originally from Kolonga (my paternal grandfather’s village in Tonga). So, while I recited my genealogy I made sure to highlight my Kolonga side. After I introduced myself, a lady stood up and introduced herself by connecting her genealogy to my genealogy. She told the congregation that we were related through my mother—my Neiafu, Vava‘u, genealogy. After the church service, several church members from Kolonga and Neiafu came and we greeted each other with fe‘iloaki. We then talked about our family members and they invited me to their house for dinner.

#### TONGANS AND NATIVE HAWAIIANS: WEAVING THE ANCIENT VĀ / WĀ

The practice of tauhi vā also appears in certain interactions between Tongan carvers and some Native Hawaiians. While talking to carvers I came to the realization that Tongans and Native Hawaiians are recreating a vā for themselves based on their belief that all Moanans originate from

common ancestors. By linking themselves to common ancestors, Tongans and Native Hawaiians locate their genealogical connections, which create (reestablish) a *vā/wā* between them. Within this context, Tongans and Native Hawaiians attempt to piece together elements of the early Moanan culture from the pieces that each group possesses. For example, many of the Tongan carvers possess the skills of tiki carving but lack detailed knowledge about the names and oral stories relating to the tiki. On the other hand, some Native Hawaiians have the knowledge about the names and stories about the tiki-gods but have forgotten the tiki-carving skills. In Maui, Tongan carvers learn the tiki names and stories from their Native Hawaiian friends, and in return, Tongans share some of their tiki-carving skills with their Native Hawaiian friends. To me, this reciprocal exchange of knowledge and skills is a form of *tauhi vā*.

The practice of *tauhi vā* between Tongans and Native Hawaiians also appears in other areas; for instance, some carvers told me that Tongans are working together with some of their Native Hawaiian friends to revive cultural practices relating to drinking kava and making tapa.

## CONCLUSION

We can see that the concept of *vā* and the practice of *tauhi vā* provide us with new spatial concepts for framing our understanding of Tongan transnationality and the ways transnational relations reaffirm connected social spaces among Tongans. By using *vā* and *tauhi vā* as conceptual categories, we are also able to identify the centrality of *hohoko* (genealogy) in organizing space and establishing *vā*.

By examining cultural specific notions of space we can gain insights into the characteristics of social space in transnational relations. For instance, in the case of Tongans, social spaces are organized through genealogy or kinship ties. For Tongans overseas, sharing one's genealogy is a way of organizing social space in order to connect self to others. In Maui, Tongans creatively and strategically establish genealogical connections, through *kāinga* and *fonua*, as a way of socially organizing space to create *vā* with others. In transnational contexts, *fonua* genealogy is creatively used to create *vā*. Often, when Tongans are not able to identify a *kāinga* genealogical link, they use a connection through *fonua*, which includes *kolo* (village) or *motu* (island), to organize a *vā* with another Tongan. In many cases in Maui, the mere genealogical connection to Tonga itself (the

fonua for all Tongans) is sufficient to create sociospatial ties between Tongans.

Within the commercial and tourist environment of Maui, Tongans strategically use their genealogy to organize culturally meaningful connecting spaces. Organizing vā and nurturing sociospatial ties are ways of locating and creating lived spaces in the midst of modern tourist spaces. In my view, this was the case for many of the tiki carvers and Tongan vendors in the markets. In a sense, vā is creatively organized by Tongans to construct connecting spaces within the “alienated” spaces of capitalism. This vā creates beneficial business “partners” for carvers. Because vā can be organized and reorganized, it is dynamic and fluid, changing all the time in response to other formations of space. In addition, tauhi vā is a spatial practice of reaffirming harmonious sociospatial relations with kin in order to create culturally meaningful life for diasporic Tongans. In Maui’s transnational world, the willingness of Tongans to allocate a significant portion of their resources to sustain social relations with geographically distant relatives points to their commitment to practicing tauhi vā.

For early Moana people, genealogical ties kept people spatially connected to one another. Kame‘eleihiwa has pointed out that for Hawaiians, genealogies order the space around them (1992, 19). Despite the fact that the Moana people were scattered in geographically distant islands, their common genealogical ties kept them connected. This was manifested by their far-reaching social and trade networks. Today, this globalized trade network continues to move along routes based on genealogical lines. According to Hau‘ofa, the transnational flow of goods among Pacific Islanders “depends on an informal movement along ancient routes drawn in bloodlines” (1994, 156). As I think more about my ancestor Maui, and his ability to maintain social and spatial ties with all of the dispersed people of Moana nui, it seems clear to me that he must have moved along ancient routes marked by genealogical lines.

A few days before I left the island of Maui, I worried that I did not have enough room in my suitcase to pack all my tiki—given to me because of tauhi vā. I finally decided that the only way to get them to Seattle would be to mail them ahead. While packing each tiki I realized that each tiki represented the multiple layers of my sociospatial ties to the Tongan tiki carvers in Maui. As I think about the future, I see myself nurturing my vā with the Tongan carvers. Ku‘ai, the protective god-tiki given to me by Sifa,

stands like a palace guard on the bedroom window of my apartment in Seattle. Each morning, I wake up and see Ku'ai, and I can feel my spatial connection to Sifa in Maui. Next time I return to Maui I plan to invite Sifa to my home for dinner. As for Sēini, the Tongan lady at the market, I hope that I can help her son get into college some day. I keep in contact with Tuki via e-mail messages, and I also sent him and 'Api an invitation to my wedding last year. In Seattle, I work together with Kalama and Haulani—both from the island of Maui—on several projects for Moanans in Seattle and elsewhere in the United States. This is how I practice tauhi vā with the kānaka 'ōiwi (indigenous people) of Maui. As we continue to maintain our transnational Moanan social spaces, we are weaving our children and grandchildren together, and we hope they will tauhi vā with one another in Maui and beyond.

\* \* \*

### *Glossary of Key Tongan Terms*

fakahoko: in the context of formal introduction, to introduce oneself by reciting one's genealogy (literally, to connect oneself to another)

fonua: land and people who are genealogically connected to a particular land

hohoko: genealogy (literally, series or succession of ties or linkages)

kāinga: Tongan kin group or kin-like group who provide nourishments for one another

kāingalotu: religious kin or congregation (kāinga: kin; lotu: church, religion)

tauhi vā/tauhi vaha'a: to take care of one's social (relationship) space with kin or kin-like members via reciprocal exchanges of food, goods, and services

vā: space between people or things. In the context of people, vā refers to sociospatial ties or sociospatial relations of kin members who are genealogically connected.

\* \* \*

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## Notes

1 Traditional Tongan speeches generally begin with a fakatapu, an expression of respect. I begin my paper with a short Tongan maau (a poetic composition). This maau is my way of paying respect and homage to the native people and land of Hawai‘i—the fonua in which I conducted my research. The maau also acknowledges the connection of all Moanans to Puluotu and Hawaiiki, the two original homelands, and the reaffirming of ancient vā in our modern time.

2 The word ‘*aina* is often glossed as land. Literally, it means “that from which one eats” (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992, 9).

3 I am aware that the term *kai* may have originated from \**kai* (n), a term meaning “people” in the Proto-Oceanic language (Kirch and Green 2001; Marck 1996; Pawley 1985).

4 I use the terms “Moana people” and “Moanan” instead of “Polynesian” because *moana* is the Polynesian word for the Pacific Ocean. I also use these terms to highlight the Oceanic culture of Moanans. I was inspired by ‘Okusitino Māhina’s writings on the term *moana* (1999a, 278; 1999b, 53), and by Futa Helu’s definition of Samoana as “sea people” (1999, 113).

5 I am aware that there were several Mauis. This may account for why Maui was present in almost all of the islands. In Tonga, oral traditions talk about Maui Motu‘a, Maui ‘Atalanga, Maui Loa, Maui Puku, and Maui Kisikisi.

6 This phrase is commonly used in Tonga to express praise and gratitude for a person who is working.

7 All names are fictitious to protect the identity of the persons.

8 Tongan oral traditions point to Puluotu as both the abode of the chiefly spirits and the homeland of the Tongan people. I follow Māhina’s recommendation to use oral tradition terms (1999a, 278; 1999b, 52). See also Geraghty 1993 for a discussion of Puluotu as a Polynesian homeland island in Fiji.

9 According to the 1996 census, there were 97,784 Tongans in Tonga (Lee 2003, 293). In three countries outside of Tonga, there were a total of 97,540 Tongans: 36,840 in the United States (Utah State Office of Pacific Islander Affairs 2000); 40,700 in New Zealand (New Zealand Government 2001); and at least 20,000 people with Tongan ancestry in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001).

10 For other anthropological texts on transnationalism, see Appadurai 1991, Clifford 1997, and Gupta 1997.

11 Masiu Moala, a known Tongan cultural specialist, has listed four fundamental Tongan cultural values: faka'apa'apa (respect); tauhi vaha'a (taking care of sociospatial ties and relations); loto-tō (willing heart); and mamahi'i me'a (loyalty). These cultural values are based on the list of Tongan values compiled by Queen Sālote Tupou III (Moala 1994, 23).

12 I first came across the term *vahaope* in the song "Tau'a'alo 'a e Fōfō'anga 'Aositalasia" by Siosuia Lafitani Pouvalu, also known as Lo'au Tofua'ipangai (2001). *Vahaope* is a compound word constructed from two Tongan words, *vaha* and *ope*. In the context of ocean traveling, *vaha* refers to the open sea between islands that connects one island to another. *Ope* means to project beyond the boundary. Thus, I define *vahaope* as space beyond the boundaries of a physical locale. Increasingly, the term *vahaope* is used by Tongans to refer to cyberspace or the Internet.

13 See also Bennardo's other works on the cognitive representation of space in Tonga (2000b; 2002).

14 In Tonga, *vā* is generally more important than *tā*, time (Māhina 2002). The high value accorded to *vā* can partly explain why Tongans (and other Moanans) often do not strictly adhere to clock time.

15 The Tongan proverb "Ko e va'ava'a he ko e tangata" (Multiple branches are the nature of humans) points to the idea that a Tongan person has numerous social relations (*vā*), which are created out of the multiple branches (*va'a*) of kinship ties.

16 The connection of kin members through social space is clearly apparent in the Tongan practice of *fe'iloaki*—kissing-cheek-to-cheek when kin members meet one another. To me, *fe'iloaki* (literally, to mutually know one another) appears to be a physical manifestation of the way *kāinga* members intersect and connect in a social space.

17 Genealogical connections to lands and families are also prominent among Native Hawaiians (Trask 1993). For a discussion on how Rotumans identify themselves through genealogy, see Hereniko (1994, 150).

18 In Tonga, this question is rarely asked because it is considered rude to ask someone directly to introduce him or herself. In the United States, it is increasingly common for Tongans to ask one another to introduce themselves.

19 The term *fatongia* (communal duties) probably derived from the Tongan term *fata* (to mutually carry a load across the shoulders of two or more people). Tongans often use the term in the context of carrying a load or putting a load on people's shoulders. This is clear from Tongan sayings such as "Mālō hono fua hotau fatongia" (Thank you for carrying our fatongia) and "Hilifaki hanau fatongia" (Lay a fatongia on them).

20 Depending on how individuals fulfill their fatongia, Tongan sociospatial relations can be described as vā-ofi (close relationship); vā-mama‘o (distant relationship); vā-tamaki or vā-kovi (bad relationship); vā-tau (warring relationship); vā-lau (murmuring relationship); vā-kē (quarreling relationship); vā-lelei (good relationship); etc. Vā can also be broken when fatongia are neglected. In this case, Tongans often say, “Kuo motu hona vā” (Their social space/relationship has been broken).

21 Tauhi vā is probably similar to the Samoan concept teu le vā (Shore 1982, 136; Duranti 1997, 345) or tausi le vā (Kavika Palaita, pers comm, 18 Nov 2002).

22 Fonua includes kolo (village) and motu (island). People who coexist in the same fonua space are genealogically connected.

23 NIH Grant NRO4377, HIV/AIDS Prevention and Pacific Islander Adolescents, Barbara Burns McGrath, principal investigator.

24 I moved to Seattle, Washington, from Salt Lake City, Utah.

25 See Janes 1990 for examples of how kinship ties are activated in the diaspora.

26 I am aware that the Hawaiian term *kū‘ai* generally means to buy, to barter, to sell, or to trade. Sifa receives his information about Hawaiian tiki from his Native Hawaiian partner.

27 There are many Tongans and Filipinos living in Kahului. This large concentration of Tongans and Filipinos may explain why there are so many money transfers to Tonga and the Philippines from Kahului, Maui.

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Littlefield.

### *Abstract*

Although studies have shown that Tongan migrants maintain strong linkages with Tongans in Tonga as well as with their kin in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, the Tongan concept of *vā*, social space, has not been used to understand Tongan transnational relations. For Tongans, *vā* is organized through one's genealogy and kinship ties. The concept of space is central to our understanding of transnationality because global practices involve the movement and flows of people and things within space and across spatial boundaries while people maintain sociospatial connections with one another. Tongans generally view reciprocal exchanges, whether within Tonga or transnational, as *tauhi vā*: taking care of sociospatial ties with kin and kin-like members. In this article, I explore the concept of *vā* and the practice of *tauhi vā* primarily through my research among Tongans in Maui, Hawai'i, as well as my experience with Tongans in Seattle, Washington. I argue that *vā* and *tauhi vā* provide us with new spatial concepts for framing our understanding of Tongan transnationality.

KEYWORDS: Social space, *vā*, transnationalism, *tauhi vā*, Tongan Americans, genealogy, *fonua*